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SUBJECT: OUTGOING MUSLIM LEADER COMMENTS ON HIS TENURE AS KRM
SPOKESMAN

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Outgoing Muslim Coordination Council (KRM) Spokesman Ali Kizilkaya on September 22 gave us a critical view of progress in relations between Germany's Muslims and the German state. Reviewing his six month tenure, which ended September 29, he asserted that the KRM had made progress as a coordinating body. He highlighted areas in which Muslims still face discrimination, commenting as well on a continuing reluctance by senior German government officials to host Iftars and contrasting this with the very positive American practice. He declined to be drawn out into an in-depth discussion of the Federal Interior Ministry's "Islam Conference," observing only that the German government clearly preferred more liberal/secular interlocutors. Kizilkaya himself is controversial because his home organization, the Islam Council, is dominated by the Milli Goerues movement, which is under observation by German authorities in several states. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a September 22 meeting at the Islam Council (Islamrat) office in Cologne with Mission POL MC, Duesseldorf CG and P/E Specialist, Kizilkaya expressed great satisfaction that a broad alliance of political and social groups in Cologne actively opposed the September 19-20 "Anti-Islamization Congress," organized by the extreme right group "Pro Koeln." Calling the demonstrations against the congress "the largest public protests in solidarity with the Muslim community in German history," he commented that similar or even larger demonstrations during the 1990s were directed against xenophobia in German society in general and were not specifically focused on the concerns of the Muslim minority. (Note: Cologne police decided September 19 to ban the "Anti-Islamization Congress," a controversial move, because it was based not on the threat of violence from extreme-right organizers, but from some far-left "autonomous" groups.) End Note.)

Developments in the KRM

¶3. (SBU) The KRM was developing well, Kizilkaya asserted, although it had only been in existence for 18 months. Cooperation between the four member organizations had improved, as the leaders had become better acquainted and developed a more trusting and harmonious work relationship. During his six months as KRM spokesman, KRM leaders only disagreed on one issue, the introduction of naturalization tests for immigrants who wanted to become German citizens. The Central Council of Muslims (ZMD) welcomed this, but the other three KRM members rejected it. Kizilkaya admitted that no progress had been achieved in establishing KRM structures at the state level, a priority when he took over in early April. He attributed this primarily to internal problems at DITIB, the religious organization affiliated with the Turkish government, which was in the midst of a restructuring and a comprehensive reform of

its statutes. Once DITIB's problems were resolved, KRM would resume efforts to establish structures at the state level. He claimed not to know who from the Association of Islamic Cultural Centers (VIKZ) would succeed him as KRM spokesman, as this was an internal VIKZ decision and not discussed at the KRM level. (Note: The VIKZ on September 29 announced the appointment of Erol Puerlue, a ConGen contact, for the next term.)

Discrimination

14. (SBU) Kizilkaya did not mince words in deploring the "continuing pervasive discrimination of Muslims in Germany." He listed four areas where this discrimination was evident, conceding that progress had been made in one less important area.

-- Islamic religious instruction at public schools. Calling this the most important and burning issue for the KRM, Kizilkaya pointed to the Protestant and Catholic religious instruction model available and well established at German schools. Asserting that 800,000 Muslim pupils are denied their constitutional rights to receive such instruction, he lamented that tens of thousands of Muslims leave school every year without having had the opportunity to learn about their faith. He dismissed the various pilot projects in place in several German states as "purely cosmetic" and far short of what was needed. He insisted that absolutely no progress has been made in this area, despite the fact that the Interior Ministry's German Islam Conference had given priority to this issue. In response to a question from CG, he acknowledged that there had been movement in Lower Saxony, but alleged that this did not alter the larger picture. Kizilkaya presented a maximalist view of the KRM's requirements and did not outline any room for compromise or flexibility.

-- Academic training of Muslim religion teachers. Kizilkaya

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called it "encouraging" that NRW Science Minister Pinkwart announced the establishment of a second chair for Islamic Studies at Muenster University and that Pinkwart would seek support from Muslim organizations for the appointment of the new professor. (Muslim organizations had protested heavily after the occupier of the first chair at the university expressed views that some considered to border on apostasy.) This was the first time that a German government official had made such assurances, Kizilkaya stated. He was waiting to judge whether Pinkwart proved his words by his actions.

-- Legal status of their organizations and mosque communities in Germany. Unlike Christian churches and Jewish communities, they had thus far not received the status of corporations under public law, which resulted in serious disadvantages for Muslim groups, including for example that Muslim groups have no representation in the advisory councils of public broadcasting institutions. Muslim groups and mosque communities have "the same status as bowling clubs" (registered associations or "eingetragene Vereine"), in Kizilkaya's formulation, which he called an untenable situation.

-- Difficulties in obtaining construction permits for new mosques. Describing difficulties in drastic terms, Kizilkaya contended that it might be easier to obtain an operating license for a nuclear power plant than to overcome the hurdles presented by German zoning and construction laws, which he said were often made artificially high for Muslims.

-- The only area where Kizilkaya saw progress concerned the recognition of Islamic holidays by school authorities, which gave Muslim students the right not to attend school on one or two Islamic holidays, depending on the state.

The Importance of Hosting Iftars

¶5. (SBU) Kizilkaya dodged the question of who was his most important Federal government interlocutor, stressing instead the importance of state governments because of their lead role in such vital issues as religious instruction. He would "never" turn to Maria Boehmer, Federal Integration Commissioner and Minister of State in the Chancellor's Office, calling her "the wrong person" for that position. Because many Muslims in Germany were citizens, it was incorrect to consider them an "integration" challenge, he said. Calling Interior Minister Schaeuble the most important KRM interlocutor, Kizilkaya was pleased that Schaeuble had tried to attend this year's KRM Iftar dinner in Cologne but was disappointed that he had to regret. Praising the Embassy's and Consulate's role in attending and hosting Iftar dinners, Kizilkaya expressed the hope that German government officials would follow that example. Muslim leaders received official greetings for Ramadan, but were still awaiting an invitation to an Iftar dinner hosted by a German Minister, at the federal or state level. He acknowledged that NRW Integration Commissioner Kufen has been inviting to Iftars in recent years, but asked why NRW Integration Minister Laschet had not done so.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Kizilkaya has opened up considerably as a contact over time, becoming more communicative during his term as KRM spokesman. He was not as strident in his criticism of German attitudes towards Islam, in government and society in general, as in previous meetings, but he was also not particularly positive either. Kizilkaya repeatedly stressed his desire for full integration of Muslims in German society, but was fuzzy about what steps both sides should take to make this happen from the bottom up; he focused almost exclusively on expectations for German government action. He declined to comment on the state of affairs in the German Islam Conference, observing only that he was not particularly pleased with it, in part because the German government evidently had reservations against him as a person, while at the same time favoring other, more liberal or secular, Muslim representatives. Kizilkaya demonstrated sensitivity to the perceived lack of engagement by senior German federal and state officials on Muslim issues, but also did not lay out an entrepreneurial vision for how Muslim leaders can move into a more prominent role.

¶7. (U) This message has been cleared with Embassy Berlin.
BOYSE